



A Union of Professionals

AFT ESEA Reauthorization Priorities

Priorities for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act:

- Maintain ESEA's original purpose of fiscal equity.
- Ensure that the federal government is not the human resources department for every school district.
- Relieve the pressure of high-stakes tests.
- Ensure that struggling schools receive the interventions that will allow them to succeed.
- Maintain the paraprofessional qualification requirements of No Child Left Behind.
- Expand access to high-quality early education.

Maintain fiscal equity

The original purpose of ESEA was to level the playing field and expand opportunity for children. ESEA must give all students the opportunities and resources they need—from computers to counselors—even if their communities can't afford them. ESEA must:

- Maintain the “maintenance of effort” requirements—that is, requirements that, in the current year, states and districts spend amounts similar to what they spent in previous years on schools.
- Not include “portability” provisions that would allow money to follow a child to that child's public school regardless of the receiving school's poverty level. Portability undermines Title I's fundamental purpose of assisting public schools with high concentrations of poverty and high-need students, and serves as a steppingstone to private school vouchers. Portability ignores the fact that concentrated poverty has a significant impact on students “beyond their own economic circumstances.” Districts with high concentrations of poverty could lose an average of \$85 per student, while the most-affluent districts could gain, on average, \$290 per student.
- Prohibit transferability that would allow states and school districts to redirect funds away from the specific populations of students those funds were

intended to assist. Under the bill, money for English language learners or low-income students could be redirected to programs serving entirely different populations.

Ensure that the federal government is not the human resources department for every district

- Teacher evaluations should not be mandated or prescribed by the federal government.
- The federalization of educator evaluations, through Race to the Top and the NCLB waivers, has been the primary reason for the escalation of high-stakes testing, which has taken the joy out of teaching and learning, has narrowed the curriculum, and has hurt efforts to attract teachers to our most struggling schools and keep them there.
- To prevent this, the bill should include a prohibition that the secretary or any other office or employee of the federal government cannot mandate teacher evaluations or prescribe their terms.

Relieve the pressure of high-stakes tests

- Testing can provide useful information about whether students are working at grade level, can inform instruction and can help teachers better

address students' needs. Used in these ways, the federal requirement for annual tests in grades 3-8 and once in high school has a purpose.

- We recommend an allowance for assessments in the form of portfolios, projects or performance tasks so that we can start assessing the 21st-century skills students need.
- We also need an accountability system that includes multiple measures, such as measures of student engagement and student health and wellness, on an equal footing with assessment results, not as afterthoughts.
- To relieve the pressure associated with annual high-stakes assessments, the inclusion of assessment results in accountability systems should be limited to tests taken once per grade span—that is, once in elementary school, once in middle school and, as is done now, once in high school.

Ensure that struggling schools receive the interventions that will allow them to succeed

- No Child Left Behind and the waivers followed a top-down punitive model, and the prescribed interventions did not work.
- Interventions should consider the needs and voices of educators and communities by requiring that school improvement teams composed of parents, educators and community members develop and implement the interventions that will be of most assistance to their schools.
- The final bill should authorize the community schools model, a proven intervention for supporting high-need schools.
- ESEA should contain a separate title to provide states with grants to support high-quality early childhood education.

Maintain the paraprofessional qualification requirements of NCLB

- Of all the things NCLB got wrong, it got this right: It gave our nation's schools more highly qualified paraprofessionals.
- NCLB put in place qualification requirements for paraprofessionals working in high-poverty schools. Those requirements helped stop school districts from hiring paraprofessionals with little experience in education and providing no professional training for them. Before those requirements became law, paraprofessionals often were assigned classroom tasks for which, through no fault of their own, they were neither prepared nor equipped.
- Today, paraprofessionals are qualified to provide much-needed instructional support.

Expand access to high-quality early education

Fifty years ago, Title I of ESEA leveled the playing field for poor students, improving the opportunities for public school children in the United States. Today, we have the opportunity to make it better again by adding a new title that makes a significant commitment to early childhood education.

- The law should incentivize states to expand preschool, to invest in high-quality child care for younger children and to make full-day kindergarten more widely available.
- A federal investment should build on the leadership and successes in states' early education programs, such as several programs that serve most of their state's 4-year-olds in public preschool, and should help states ramp up their programs.
- Programs should meet high-quality benchmarks like teachers with bachelor's degrees; developmentally appropriate, research-based curriculum; and a full-day, full-year program.